

INQUESTS AT THE RADCLIFFE INFIRMARY.





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THE following observations upon the Statement presented to the Lord Chancellor by the Committee of Management of the Radcliffe Infirmary, have been submitted for his Lordship's consideration, by the Coroner :—

The substance of the Statement is a Petition that the Lord Chancellor will declare it illegal for the Coroner of the City to move a body lying at the Infirmary ;— and that his Lordship will intervene, to hinder the Coroner from ordering removal in future.

I do not know any privilege, under which bodies lying at the Infirmary are exempt from the jurisdiction of the Coroner of the City. No injury is suggested, and no complaint by friends. I believe the friends are pleased that the bodies should be in my keeping.

Moving a body from one place to an other within the jurisdiction, has been the practice of Coroners from time immemorial : I am not aware of any Judicial decision, or expression of opinion, against it. The Coroner's power was disputed in a case at Canterbury, in 1891, reported to the late Lord Chancellor. The Lord Chancellor, after enquiry made, expressed no disapprobation ; and the Coroner continues the practice of moving bodies to the Mortuary, for Inquest. The practice of centuries has been accepted by Coroners : it is essential for the orderly performance of their duties. If the Coroner has no such power, with whom does the necessary power rest ? and whose consent is wanted for the purpose ? Is the body to remain at the spot where it falls at death, till

after view by the Jury? What, if it is at the bottom of the River?

The Coroners Act (1887,) gives, — what was wanted, — a Statutory power for recovery of the full expenses of making a *post-mortem* examination, and moving the body to and from the proper place, where such is provided. It does not interfere with the power which the Coroner has at Common Law of moving a body lying within his jurisdiction, to an other place at his discretion.

In early times, the Coroners were the Coroners for the Counties. There were few boroughs in which they were excluded, — as now by the Municipal Corporation Act of 1835. In the boroughs, — then, as now, — it is submitted that it was a sufficient compliance with the directions of the Statutes, that the Coroner, — whether the Mayor, or other Coroner of the franchise, or the Coroner for the county, — should sit in some convenient place, at his discretion, so that it be within the jurisdiction. I do not know any opinion of authority against it. It must have been a rare case, and in distant times, that an Inquest was held with the body in Court, or in the open air, upon a body lying there openly, and from the time of death or finding. I do not know any authority in history for the statement that an Inquest was so held. Writers had little practical knowlege of the *Lex Coronatoria*, and had not been present at Inquests. They do not refer to the custom and practice of Coroners. The meaning of the early Statutes was that the Coroner should go, as soon as he conveniently could, to where the body was lying, — being within his jurisdiction; and, after hearing the particulars of the case, he should give directions for summoning jurors, and collecting witnesses. There was no law to forbid his moving the body to a place

more convenient for the Inquest, — nor, to require him to stay with the body at the spot where lying, or where death happened, until the Jury and witnesses were in attendance.

I have moved several bodies from the Infirmary, and from other places, to the Mortuary for Inquest. I have moved a body from the Mortuary to an other place, holding the Inquest at that other place. In two cases, when viewing the body, I gave my opinion that it would have been better if the body had been moved to the Mortuary for the Inquest. In none of the cases has any objection or complaint been made, — except by Managers of the Infirmary. No member of the Committee, no Officer of the Infirmary, or other person, has asked, why a body was moved: and the only explanation, — if it may be called so, — before these remarks, is the letter to the Committee, nine months before the first body was moved.

The two Coroners for the University, under a Charter granted by King Charles the First, have the jurisdiction over bodies of Members of the University lying dead in the four hundreds in and around the City. There are not on an average more than 2 Inquests a-year. Bodies under this privilege have been, several times within my knowlege, moved from one place to an other by direction of the Coroners; and since the Mortuary has been provided, 3 bodies of Members of the University have been taken there for Inquest.

Unless the law is as here stated, the greater part of the buildings called Mortuaries, — the creation of modern Statutes, — often at a distance from the place where death happened, or where the body was when the death was reported to the Coroner, must be useless; and it must be illegal to use them for most of the purposes for which they have been pro-

vided throughout the country at the public expense.

The damp and unwholesome cell at the Infirmary, — made more so by the wall lately raised on the adjoining land, at the South side, — in which the body is placed, not always in decent condition when presented to view, the place sometimes crowded with other bodies, — is not, in my opinion, a fit place for necessary attendance of Jurors, not always persons familiar with such sights. Moreover, the bodies, in the keeping of Officers of the Infirmary, are not safe from violence. This has been brought to the knowledge of the Committee: and no attention paid to the complaints addressed to them. Besides, after being sworn at the room, where the Inquests are held, close to the Mortuary, the Jury ought not, without good and sufficient reason, to be put to the trouble and delay of going to the Infirmary to view the body. If the Coroner has not the power to move the body, has he the power to make the Jury go to a distance to view it? I have been Coroner 16 years: and I do not call to mind any case where the witnesses have been, as stated in the Petition, present at the Infirmary, until they came, at my directions, to the Inquest.

The Petition does not mention that other bodies, upon which an Inquest is required, have been moved from the Infirmary, by other persons, with the knowledge and consent of Officers of the Infirmary, without communication with the Coroner, and without expression of disapprobation by the Committee afterwards. Nine such cases have come to my knowledge; — a Certificate of death in some cases being sent to the Registrar, that the death might be registered, and the body buried without Inquest.

In the City, within my jurisdiction as Coroner,

there are a Prison, a Workhouse, a Lunatic Asylum, the Stations of two different Railway Companies, and the Establishment of the Police. At all of them, I receive courtesy, and friendly help in the discharge of my duties: at the Radcliffe Infirmary, I do not receive either; — notwithstanding the advice given to the Committee, by Mr. Secretary Cross upon their soliciting his intervention, — that “the Officers of the Infirmary should readily conform to all legal requirements of the Coroner, and should render to him every assistance in the conduct of his Inquest.”

Finally, I venture respectfully to submit to the Lord Chancellor, that no public body, such as the Committee of the Radcliffe Infirmary, has the right to interfere with the Coroner’s discretion in the conduct of his Inquest.

Oxford, 10 April 1893.

TO THE HOUSE-SURGEON (MR. H.) RADCLIFFE
INFIRMARY.

AN order for a *post-mortem* examination must be to the Surgeon, who treated the case; — unless I follow the practise of the Coroner for the County, and send a Practitioner in the neighborhood to make it, instead of the Medical Officers of the Institution. From what I hear, the fall was accidental; and I do not think the Jury will require the body to be opened.

27 May 1882.

TO THE HOUSE-SURGEON (MR. S.).

AT present I know nothing of the case beyond the few words in the Secretary’s notice; and I am unable to say whether an examination of the body

will be necessary, to satisfy the Jury of the cause of the Child's death. Moreover, an order from me for such a purpose ought to be given to the Practitioner who treated the Patient; and I do not know who that was.

13 November 1882.

TO THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMITTEE OF MANAGEMENT.

IT has been reported to me that upon the occasion of the last Inquest held at the Infirmary, one of the Resident Officers, who had been warned to attend and give evidence, expressed himself as not altogether satisfied with the manner in which the arrangements for Inquests were generally made by the Summoning Officer.

Referring to the letter of 8 March 1879 from the Secretary of State to the Chairman of the Committee, I beg the favor of your informing me whether the arrangements made by the Summoning Officer are approved by the Committee, and if not, what more can be done for the convenience of the Officers of the Institution.

13 November 1883.

TO THE SAME.

AS no answer is given in the Secretary's letter, to the question put in my letter to you, I assume that the arrangements generally made for Inquests are approved by the Committee.

The earliest possible notice of the time appointed for an Inquest has in every case been given to the House-Surgeon, or person supposed to be acting for him. In the case in question, the Officers of the House must have known, before I, or the Summoning

Officer, heard of the death, that an Inquest would be necessary; and I am informed that the Summoning Officer gave notice to the Porter between 5 and 6 o'clock on Wednesday afternoon, — 21 hours before the hour appointed for the Inquest, — that hour being named under the belief that, while it suited other necessary parties, it was not inconvenient to the Officers of the House. It is desirable in all cases that the Summoning Officer should himself communicate with the Officer of the House: but he has been refused permission to do so by a former Porter, — acting, as he said, under direction.

As the Committee express an intention of adhering to the directions advised by the Secretary of State, I take the liberty of pointing out, in compliance with those directions, that earlier notice of a death might in many cases be given to me and to the Summoning Officer, — with fuller particulars than those in the printed ticket sent to me. In the late case, the only description of the deceased was, "Unknown, about 40," — leaving it to be inferred that the sex of the Patient was unknown, as well as the name. Such information as this should be furnished; — When the Patient was admitted, — the time of death, and supposed cause: — if brought from a distance, the name and residence of the person who came with the Patient: — the Medical person by whose order the treatment was prescribed, — and which of the House-Surgeons, or Medical person acting as such, was in attendance; with some particulars of the case, which will readily suggest themselves to Medical Officers.

I have also to request, — in cases where one of the Resident Officers has notice to attend, — that he may be in attendance at the time appointed, that he may identify the body, when necessary; and that the pro-

ceedings may not be delayed, while the Summoning Officer leaves the Court to fetch him.

19 November 1883.

TO THE SECRETARY.

THANKS for the opportunity you give me of seeing the Form of Notice. You should add to it, — the injury, or disease, for which the Patient was admitted. I do not wish to be too critical: but I would suggest the omission of the word “apparent,” added to the “age;” and “alleged,” as part of the “circumstances of death.” “Apparent” is a positive statement: it does not allow a correction. Yet the age is often given incorrectly by a Patient when admitted. In the case of a Patient dying in a Hospital, with Nurses, Medical Officers, and House-Surgeon in attendance, — to say nothing of Steward, Matron, and House-Visitors, — the “circumstances of death” are known. The Medical Officers can give the “supposed cause.” It throws an air of suspicion around the case, when something is “alleged.”

3 December 1883.

TO THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMITTEE.

J. M. was admitted into the Infirmary some weeks ago with a broken leg; and he died, as I have heard, in the House 22nd January. The case was not reported to me. In a certificate sent to the Registrar of deaths, other symptoms are named, with the fracture, as causes of the man's death. Although there may have been other causes concurring, or following the injury, notice of the man's death ought to have been given to me as the Coroner.

2 February 1886.

TO THE SAME.

AT an Inquest held at the Infirmary on Friday last, upon the body of C. C., it appeared that the body of the Patient had been opened for examination without permission from me. The same thing was done in the case of W. C., an other Patient, upon whose body I held an Inquest on 17th March last: I did not hear of it till some days after the Inquest.

As it is a very improper proceeding, — to interfere in that way with the duty of the Coroner, — I beg the favor of your taking such order in the matter, that it may not be done again.

19 October 1886.

TO THE HOUSE-SURGEON (Mr. R.).

A WRITTEN order for the examination can only be given to the Practitioner who treated the case. I say this, however, with some hesitation; because the Coroner for the County claims the power to appoint whom he likes to the duty, and to send him into a Hospital to make the examination. It seems to me that this former power of the Coroner is superseded by the Medical Witness Act, passed 50 years ago. The Chairman avoids the difficulty. He says, — the Coroner's written authority should be had. This would be an answer to any question, if raised by the friends. The duty required of the Coroner is often of a kind far from agreeable among the friends of the deceased person whose case comes before him; and much courtesy and forbearance is wanted.

There have been 3 cases in the present year of which I have had to complain, — a Certificate sent to the Registrar, without notice to me, of death after a fracture, — 2 bodies opened without my know-

lege; and in one of the two, the fact of the examination being kept back by the witness. It is not desirable that such things should be done in a Hospital; or that questions should be raised in public about them.

Fuller particulars ought, I think, — in common courtesy among Professional men acting as Public Officers, — to be given to me, in any case of unusual occurrence, before I come to the House for the Inquest. I am willing to pay a visit, for the purpose of obtaining it, if I know whom I should see for the purpose, and where, (in that large and busy building,) I could find him; and, if it will save the trouble of writing and sending a messenger. The Summoning Officer has been refused permission to enter the House for that purpose. If the whole of what is necessary, to explain the case to the Jury, is known to me beforehand, it will save time to all parties whose duty requires them to attend the Inquest.

25 October 1886.

TO THE SAME.

THE Registrar should be a safeguard against the mistake of a Practitioner. In P.'s case, — as in M.'s in February 1886, — he registered the death without question, although the death is stated in the Certificate to be from a fracture; which is one of the cases specially mentioned, in the printed directions from the Register Office, to be referred to the Coroner before registration. I did not hear of the death till Thursday evening. To-day I hear that the body has been buried. From what I have heard, I am not satisfied that all persons present at the accident are free from blame. I hope to have full particulars to-morrow; when I should decide whether, or not, an Inquest should be held. In Middlesex,

the body would be dug up at once. But, I am not willing to do that, unless some measure of public good will be gained by it.

9 April 1887.

TO THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMITTEE.

G. P. died in the Infirmary on the 5th inst., from the effects of injuries received in a fall from a tree; for which he was under treatment in the House at the time of the accident, several months ago. The circumstances of the case, and that his death was caused by the injuries received, were well known to the Officers of the House. A certificate that his death was caused by a fractured spine was given for the purpose of registration; and the body was removed from the Infirmary. No notice of the case was given to me.

I take the liberty, as Coroner, of calling the attention of the Committee to these irregularities. The length of time which passed between the receipt of the injuries and the day of death, does not affect the duties of the Coroner.

12 April 1887.

TO THE SAME.

A. A. died in the Infirmary on Monday morning last, at 9 o'clock. The first notice of his death was brought to me on Tuesday afternoon at half-past 3 — 30 hours after the death. At the Inquest I found that the body had been opened, without permission from me. I call the attention of the Committee to these irregularities; and I venture to remind the Committee of the Chairman's letter to me in October 1886, that in such a case the body of a Patient should not again be opened, except on written authority from me.

J. K. died in the Infirmary on Saturday, 22 October 1887, at half-past 7 in the evening. The first notice of his death was brought to my house on Monday, the 24th, about 12 o'clock, — 40 hours after the death. I call the attention of the Committee to the irregularity in this case also. I was about to take a journey to a distance, to return on Thursday. If reasonable notice had been given of the death, the Inquest could have been held on Monday, before I left home. As it was, I had to come back to Oxford on Tuesday for the purpose of holding the Inquest. The journey on that day, to and from Oxford, was caused by the neglect of the Officers of the Infirmary; and I think I am entitled to expect that the House should bear the expense; and I beg the favor of your ordering the payment accordingly.

In March 1879, the Secretary of State, in reply to the Chairman's letter soliciting his interference, advised that the Officers of the Infirmary should readily conform to all legal requirements of the Coroner, and should render to him every assistance in the conduct of his Inquests; and in November 1883, the Committee, through their Secretary, expressed to me their intention of adhering to the directions of the Secretary of State. I take the liberty of submitting to the Committee that the irregularities, to which I have now and on other occasions called their attention, are not such an adherence to his directions as the Secretary of State would approve.

16 August 1888.

TO THE SAME.

IT is the duty of the Governors of the Infirmary to send me notice of the death of a Patient without unnecessary delay. It is also their duty to take care

that the body is not opened without orders from me ; and to see that all Officers of the House, who have knowlege of the circumstances, are in attendance to give evidence. The rules of the House, and the "inadvertence," — as suggested by you — of an Officer, do not release the Governors from their duty.

The case of A. is the only case to which your letter refers. In that case, the names of Mr. S. and Mr. A. were given to me as the medical persons in attendance during life. It appeared at the Inquest, that neither of them was present when the body was opened for examination ; and no one who was present at the examination attended to give evidence.

30 August 1888.

TO THE SAME.

W. G. was admitted into the Infirmary, 21st September, and died, as I am informed, the same day, with symptoms of what is commonly known as "Blood-poisoning." A certificate of the cause of death, expressed partly in Latin and partly in Greek, was sent for registration, without notice first given to me. There was reasonable ground of suspicion that his death was owing to unnatural causes ; and, being so, notice of the death ought to have been given to me.

2 October 1888.

TO THE SECRETARY, LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOARD.

REFERRING to the Coroners Act, 1887, that a Coroner shall in certain cases summon a Jury for enquiry, I beg the favor of your informing me whether any special instructions are issued by the Local Government Board for Medical Officers of

Health giving information to the Coroners, in any of such cases coming to their knowlege.

The reason for asking the question now, is that a man was lately admitted into the Radcliffe Infirmary here, dying the same day, with symptoms of what is generally known as "Blood-poisoning," from injuries supposed to have been received by him from cattle, or dead meat, in the course of his work as a farmer's, or butcher's porter. I have been informed that one of the Medical Officers of the Infirmary went to the farm, where the man had been at work, to learn whether the cattle there, were in health, or not.

A medical Certificate, that he died from, "Cellulitis of arm, Septicemia, and Syncope," was sent from the Infirmary for registration, — the death was registered, — and the body removed, and buried, without my knowlege, and without communication to me from the Registrar of deaths, or the Officer of Health, who is, — as you, no doubt, know, — one of the Medical Officers of the Infirmary.

21 November 1888.

TO THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMITTEE.

ON the 15th of April, I called the attention of the Secretary to the want of information in the printed notice sent to me on the death of a Patient. I beg the attention of the Committee to the notice sent last week.

No information is given under the heads of — Age, — Time of death, — or Circumstances of death, — and the only information under the head of, — Injury, — or disease, — is "Railway Accident." The name of Mr. S. is given as, — Medical Officer in charge of the case, — though he did not see the Patient when alive. The name of Mr. P. is given

as, — Resident Medical Officer in attendance. Mr. P was not present at the Inquest. He must have known that the case was one in which an Inquest is required, and that the Inquest would be held on Friday afternoon. It can not be doubted that he knew also that it would be at the hour at which Inquests have been generally held, for several years past. The Officers of the House had been informed that in this case it would be so; and the table and benches had been set out in the Hall, ready for me and the Jury.

2 September 1889.

TO THE SAME.

THE form of Notice with the heads of information required, was settled some years ago through Mr. G. W., who was for many years an active member of the Committee.

As the Senior Honorary Surgeon it is my duty to the Infirmary to point out that, in the case mentioned (G.'s,) the Medical persons who saw the Patient, saw that he was a Boy, between the ages of babyhood and manhood, — that he had a fracture of the skull, with other injuries, — that he was in a dying state, when admitted, — and that he so died, — without being seen by the Medical Officer who would have been in charge of the case, if he had lived. This information is necessary for the purpose of the Coroner's enquiry: and, — I submit respectfully to the Committee, — he is entitled to expect that it will be sent.

The notice given by me of the time for holding an Inquest, has always been found by the Officers of the House to be sufficient; and it was so in this case. The Chairman's letter does not refer to the neglect of the House-Surgeon to attend. The Com-

mittee must be aware that it is the duty of their Servants to be attendant on the Coroner: it is no part of his duty to wait upon them. The Coroners Act of 1887 has given the Coroner fresh powers for bringing a witness before him. I shall be sorry to find it necessary to make use of them.

P.S. In the last case (N.'s,) the notice was sent 20 hours after the death of the Patient.

9 September 1889.

TO THE SAME.

THE delay of the Inquest, — while the particulars of the case are being collected and considered, witnesses found, their testimony sifted, and all necessary persons formally summoned by judicial process, — will in many cases be a source of distress and of expense to the friends of the Patients; but under the action of the Committee and their Servants, it will be unavoidable. The directions given by the Secretary of State point to a different course of action as desirable.

16 September 1889.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE OXFORD CHRONICLE.

MY attention has been called to a letter in the *Oxford Chronicle*, published by order of the Committee of Management of the Radcliffe Infirmary, referring to an Inquest lately held there.

The persons to ask why an Inquest was held in a given case are the friends of the deceased person. No such request has been made to me; and I have no reason to think they are displeased that the case was in my hands. It does not appear that the letter from the Committee is published by the wish of the friends, or on their behalf.

From information given, — which I then believed, and which I still believe, to be true, — it appeared that the young woman in question, after due notice given at the Infirmary, was admitted on Thursday about one o'clock, that she was not sensible when admitted, that she continued insensible to the time of her death on Friday morning, and that she was not seen by any Physician or Surgeon of the Infirmary. After death, her friends were told at the Infirmary that a Medical Certificate could not be given without opening the body. Upon this they put themselves in communication with my Officer; and it became my duty to the Crown to summon a Jury for the purpose of enquiry.

On taking the Jury to view, I saw that the body had been opened. This, as I have been informed, — and as I believe, — was done without the consent of the friends.

During the proceedings at the Inquest, one of the gentlemen residing in the House, who had been examined as a witness, — after signing the depositions and retiring from the seat in front of the Jury, — asked whether he might put a question to me. I told him he must not; and that if he continued to interrupt the proceedings, he would be put out of the room. Before I left the room, I told him I was ready to hear, if he wished to say anything. He replied, that he did not wish to say anything.

What passed in the House with the view of hindering the Coroner, — by force, if necessary, — from holding the Inquest, the Committee have not made public.

22 October 1889.

TO THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMITTEE.

AGAIN I beg attention to the Notice sent to me of the death of a Patient, — A. T. Again I submit to the Committee, that I am entitled to expect that the Officers of the House should give a better description of the nature and extent of the injury, — and of the circumstances of death. I venture to point out for the consideration of the Members of the Committee that, when proper and full information is withheld, it leaves a doubt whether the Patient had that amount of attention, which should enable the Officers to give it; and it creates a suspicion that there is something to be concealed.

In the notice in this case, the Child is stated to have been admitted on the 15th inst. The fact is, the accident happened on the 16th; and the Child was admitted on the 18th. He died on the 23rd, at $\frac{1}{2}$ past 4, in the afternoon; and notice of the death was not brought to me till after 10 o'clock on the 24th. The Secretary saw my Officer that morning at the Town Hall, before I had the notice; and he did not tell him of the Patient's death.

30 June 1890.

TO THE SAME.

IN acknowledgement of a letter by the Secretary, — I submit, as a Governor, that means should be taken to employ servants who are not so often guilty of “inadvertence,” and “accidental,” and “clerical errors.”

The absence of the Secretary at the death of the Patient, — suggested in the letter as the cause of delay, — did not hinder the persons in the House from sending notice of the Child's death, that day to the Parents. The messenger who took the notice might, at the same time, have brought notice to me, or to my Officer. What is wanted in case of a death

is shown in the printed form of Notice: the Secretary has the Form, and he can supply it.

In T.'s case, 5 words are given as the nature of the injury, and the circumstances of death. No kind of injury is described; and what is stated, — in 2 of the 5 words, — as being the circumstances of death, took place and had passed off, 2 days before the Child was admitted. The Committee give their opinion that this was sufficient for the purpose of the Inquest. Let me remind them that the Law of the land has made the Coroner the judge of that. "In the exercise of his discretion," — the Secretary of State advised the Committee, — "he is not to be interfered with."

Members of the Committee will, I think, agree with me that the question, — What particulars can be given? — to make known the nature and extent of the injury, and the circumstances of the death, to persons who have not seen the Patient, and whose duty it is to make enquiry, on behalf of the Queen, into the causes which may have brought about the death, would come properly, and in a more direct course, through the Medical Officers.

There can be no question of the duty of the Governors, in every case of death, to take care that all particulars wanted by the Coroner are sent to him without delay.

8 July 1890.

TO THE SAME.

IN acknowledgement of a letter by the Secretary, — the arrangements proposed by the Resolution of the Committee, if acted upon honestly, as the wish of the Governors, will, I think, be found useful. Now and then it may happen that little or no incon-

venience arises from delay; but in most cases it will be to the comfort of the friends, and to the convenience of all persons concerned, if the Coroner has notice, — with whatever particulars are known, — as soon as can be after the death.

In the case of A. F. W., who died on Thursday last, I received within 2 hours a letter from the House-Surgeon, telling me the hour of his death, without other information. When he was admitted, and for what complaint, — which of the Medical Officers had the charge of his case, — how he died and why, — the letter did not tell. I did not, — then or afterwards, — have from the Secretary, or other person, the printed paper with particulars, which has always been sent to me from the Infirmary until lately. I have been informed that, when the House-Surgeon gave his letter to the Porter, he told him not to give me any information about the case.

21 July 1890.

TO THE SAME.

NOTICE of the death of J. R. A. was brought to me on Wednesday last, — without a statement of the nature of the injury for which he was admitted — or of the circumstances attending his death: nor was the name or residence given, of the persons who brought him to the Infirmary, nor other information by which I could obtain the particulars for registration of the death. The name of Mr. P. was given as "Resident Medical Officer in attendance:" he did not attend the Inquest.

By a letter from the Secretary, I understand it to be the intention of the Committee, that no information shall be given but what their subordinates think fit to give. I beg the favor of your informing

the Medical Officers that, in future Inquests, — during the tenure of office by the present House-Surgeon, — it will be my duty to the Crown to require the personal attendance of the proper Physician or Surgeon who had charge of the case, — and also of the Nurse or other person, present at the time of death ; — perhaps also, your own attendance and that of the Secretary or Matron, if a question of any neglect should arise during the enquiry.

As a Governor and an Officer of the Infirmary, — not less than as one of the High Officers of the City, — I regret much the necessity, under which it becomes my duty to depart from the advice given to the Committee by the Secretary of State, under which I have acted without a single exception, from the time that advice was given until now.

28 July 1890.

TO THE REV. M. U. C.

THANKS for your letter, and for the trouble you have taken in writing. Your letter takes no notice of the fact that Mr. P. was in Oxford when the Committee had my letter of July 21 before them. You tell me nothing of any enquiry by the Committee into matters in that letter, — nor in others which I have at different times addressed to them : nor do I gather from your letter that there is any intention on the part of the Committee, to make their Servants give any help in the enquiry which I have to make. No suggestion has been made that there is anything unreasonable in what I ask or any difficulty in giving it.

31 July 1890.

TO THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMITTEE.

AGAIN it is my duty to the Crown to call attention to a Certificate of the death of a Patient, sent to the Registrar, without notice first sent to me. S. L. H., admitted, November 29, with extensive burns about the limbs, died on the 6th inst. Notice of the case ought to have been sent to me immediately on her death. Instead of sending such notice, a certificate of the death was sent to the Registrar, to be registered, — for the purpose of burial without enquiry. The Registrar very properly refused to register the death without my permission.

Having received satisfactory assurance that Mr. P., late House-Surgeon, was no longer at the Infirmary, I was able to dispense with the personal attendance of the acting Physician or Surgeon, which, — otherwise, — I should have required at the Inquest.

From the evidence at the Inquest, it appeared that the Child was seen by one of the Surgeons of the Infirmary on Tuesday; and she was not seen afterwards by him, or by any other of the Surgeons or Physicians of the Infirmary, before her death on Saturday. I venture to submit that the Governors, and the friends of the Patients, are entitled to expect that they shall have the personal attendance and care of the Physician and Surgeon, whose names are given by the Committee, as the Officers personally undertaking that duty.

9 December 1890.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE OXFORD REVIEW.

IN the *Oxford Review* is a letter from one of the two paid Physicians of the Radcliffe Infirmary, in which he calls attention to an Inquest lately held

there. He was not present; and he does not refer to the circumstances under which it became the duty of the Coroner to act. If he had asked me, I would have told him why the Inquest was held; and I would have pointed out how imperfect the examination made of the body after death was, and how inefficient for the purposes of the Inquest.

How is it, Sir, let me ask, that people are so ready to give opinions about imperfect or unnecessary Inquests, and other excesses, and to set the Coroner right in the discharge of what they think his duties? What would be said of a man who went into a church during the service, and proceeded to tell the Minister how the service ought to be carried on? What of a man who went into a sick-room, and in the hearing of the Patient, lectured upon the proper way of treating his case? Yet such things are done in connection with the Coroner's work.

There is not any public Officer for whose neglect or misbehavior a remedy is more easy to be had. But these persons have not the courage of their opinions; and they do not bring their complaints, — real or imaginary, — to the knowledge of the one person who has the power to enquire into them, and whose duty it is to administer a remedy.

If all Medical Practitioners (especially those connected with Public Institutions), instead of giving certificates, by which the true cause of death is kept out of sight, would put themselves in communication with the Coroner, there would be very few cases of death from natural causes in which a Coroner would think it necessary to hold an Inquest.

19 February 1892.

TO THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMITTEE.

ON Tuesday last I held an Inquest on the body of H. F. His body had been opened by Officers of the Infirmary before I heard of his death, and of the circumstances which made it necessary to summon a Jury.

His wife asked the House-Surgeon for a certificate of his death. He told her that if she would consent to have a *post-mortem* examination, it would avoid an Inquest. This was not a proper remark to be made to a person seeking the benefits of a Charitable Institution. She could not know, — what all Officers of the Infirmary know, — that the question (whether, or not, there shall be an Inquest,) is for the Coroner alone; and that no one else has anything to do with it. Upon this suggestion of an Inquest, it was the duty of the Officers to refer at once to me as the Coroner, and to leave the body untouched, unless they had an order from me, in case I thought an examination necessary.

Opening the body without my knowlege or consent, has been brought to the knowlege of the Committee on former occasions; and I have had their assurance that it would not be done again. Under these repeated acts, neither stopped nor censured by the Committee, it may become my duty to remove the bodies of deceased Patients, immediately after death, to where they will be safe from violence.

On the 20th of April last, after an Inquest upon the body of W. G. C., his brother complained to me that, when going with the Undertaker to the Infirmary to see the body, and to make arrangements for the funeral, they were refused permission to do so. I told him that if I had heard that before the Inquest, I would have ordered the removal of the body to where it would have been in my own keep-

ing, and where the arrangements he wished might have been made.

On Saturday, 9th January, in the present year, a young Child, dangerously ill, H. R. F., taken to the Infirmary on the advice of a Medical Practitioner in the neighborhood, was admitted about 12 o'clock, and placed nominally under the care of one of the Physicians of the Infirmary. The Child died, without relief, about 9 o'clock, without having been seen by him, or by the other physician. Upon asking for a certificate of the death, the House-Surgeon told the Father that a certificate could not be given without a *post-mortem* examination. The father would not allow that; and the House-Surgeon told him the case must be left to an Inquest. The Inquest was held by me on the 11th.

These several matters are respectfully submitted to the attention of the Committee.

22 February 1892.

TO THE SAME.

YESTERDAY I held an Inquest on a young Child, T. H. H. He died on Saturday afternoon about $\frac{1}{2}$ past 2 o'clock. The first information I had of his death was from the Porter, whom I met by chance at a $\frac{1}{4}$ to 12 on Monday, as he was going to my house with the notice, — 45 hours after the death of the Child.

On several former occasions I have called the attention of the Committee to the great and unnecessary delay at the Infirmary in sending notice. "It is an offence against the law," Lord Chancellor Selborne declared, "to delay giving notice to the Coroner."

9 March 1892.

TO THE SAME.

A CHILD (S. W.) died in the Infirmary on Saturday morning about 6 o'clock. The first notice I had of the death was from a paper left at my house at $\frac{1}{2}$ past 9 at night, — the messenger going away at once, saying there was no answer.

At the Inquest on Tuesday, it appeared that the Father and Mother were told of the death by telegraph at Wheatley about 10 o'clock, and came to the Infirmary about $\frac{1}{2}$ past 12, — being kept there till after 4 o'clock. The Father then asked for a certificate; and he was told that there would be an Inquest. He then went home, not knowing what else to do in the case.

The poor people would have been saved much trouble, and the Inquest might have been held on Monday, if — during the four hours they were kept waiting, — they had been told to go to me, or to my Officer. The Jury gave their opinion that they ought not to have been kept waiting so long, and to so little purpose.

While I bring these, to the notice of the Committee, I beg that there may not be a smoking of tobacco in the hall during the sitting of the Coroner's Court.

20 April 1892.

TO THE SAME.

AT an Inquest on Thursday upon S. G. W., who died from the effects of a broken leg, it appeared that a certificate of the death had been sent to the Registrar for the purpose of registration. The only notice to me was that certificate, which the Registrar sent to me, about twenty-two hours after the death. He very properly refused to register it.

The Jury expressed their opinion that giving the certificate was a very improper proceeding on the part of the Officers of the House. I told them that a similar thing had been done several times ; and that I had brought it to the notice of the Committee.

The certificate certifies the death as being from a different cause from what was given in evidence by the attending House-Surgeon. It was given by one of the gentlemen residing in the House ; and he, as I am informed, saw the Patient only once, and that about a quarter of an hour before he died.

The House-Surgeon was not present, as he ought to have been, at the sitting of the Court ; and he did not attend till the Officer of the Court had been twice to him to call him ; and when he came, he did not express any kind of regret at having kept the Court and Jury waiting.

The Jury expressed very strongly their disapprobation of this behavior in an Officer of a Public Institution ; and they asked whether some arrangement could not be made by me under which the medical evidence could be had, without waiting for a House-Surgeon, as was the case then, and had been on former occasions. The Jury desired me to bring this to the notice of the Committee.

On 31st May (Tuesday) an Inquest was held on a lad (G. E. M.) whose body was brought to the House on Saturday ; he having died as he was being taken there, after a gunshot wound of the head. His clothes were searched at the Infirmary ; and a paper with writing on it was taken from his pocket. The contents of this were made known to the newspapers on Saturday or Sunday. It was not brought to my knowledge till at the end of the Inquest on Tuesday, by which time

the paper had become so dirty, that it was not easy to read the writing on it.

When it was seen at the Infirmary that the lad was dead, beyond hope of recovery, his body ought to have been moved to a place of safety, to wait my orders. The examination of the pockets ought to have been left for my Officer. If from any accidental cause, the paper had come into the hands of an Officer of the Infirmary, it ought to have been given at once to my Officer, without being shown to anyone else.

As a Governor of the Infirmary, and one of the Honorary Medical Officers, I regret the necessity under which it becomes my duty, as an Officer of the Crown, to bring such matters so often to the notice of the Committee.

19 July 1892.

TO THE HOUSE-SURGEON (DR. D.).

TO those who do not know what has been the behavior of House-Surgeons, Medical Officers and Governors, during the time I have held the Office of Coroner, it might seem a want of courtesy, if I failed to acknowledge the receipt of the letter I have had from you, — a member of the same profession, my junior by many years.

What I brought to the notice of the Committee, was that a Certificate of a death after violence had been sent for registration, and that no notice was sent to me. I pointed out that the Certificate had been given without such a knowledge of the Patient as a Practitioner ought to have, when he puts his hand to a document of that importance; and that the cause of death there stated was different from what was afterwards given in evidence at the Inquest.

22 July 1892.

TO THE TOWN CLERK.

IN writing to the Chairman of the Committee at the Radcliffe Infirmary on an other subject, I mentioned the case of a Lad (G. E. M.), whose body was taken there on Saturday, 28th May, — he having died on the way there. His pockets were searched at the Infirmary, and a paper with writing, which came into the hands of the Officers of the Infirmary, was not brought to my notice till at the end of the Inquest on Tuesday. The Chairman tells me that what was done at the Infirmary was done at the direction of the Police.

I am informed by others that the Police did not see the body, either during life, or after death, that they did not give any directions to the Officers of the Infirmary, or to other persons, and that they did not see the paper in question, till it was brought to me at the Inquest by one of the House-Surgeons.

I beg the favor of your submitting this to the Watch Committee.

25 July 1892.

TO THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMITTEE.

THE suggestion in your letter, — that, instead of keeping the Jury waiting for the House-Surgeons, I should summon the Medical Officers by legal process, — may be good. In future cases, it shall be done.

I have referred to the City Watch Committee the statement in your letter that what was done at the Infirmary in M.'s case was done at the direction of the Police. I am informed that they did not give directions to persons at the Infirmary, or to others; and that they did not see the paper in question till it was brought to me at the Inquest by one of the House-Surgeons.

2 August 1892.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE OXFORD CHRONICLE.

IN the *Oxford Chronicle* of Saturday is a letter from the Vice-Chairman of the Committee of Management of the Radcliffe Infirmary, referring to an Inquest lately held there.

If he had asked me, why the House-Surgeon was not called to give evidence, I would have told him. He says the House-Surgeon had not any notice of the Inquest. The fact is, the House-Surgeon knew perfectly well, the time at which the Inquest would be held; and he ordered the Nurse and the Porter away from their known places of attendance, on purpose, as I believe, — and, as I distinctly suggest — that they might not be ready when wanted for the Inquest.

Instead of trying to raise a cloud, to keep from public view the hindrances which are steadily and intentionally put in the way of the Coroner's duties, the Vice-Chairman of the Committee would do a laudable service to that useful and wealthy Establishment, if he would give attention to keeping in order the Officers and Servants, who are now, — all of them alike — in the pay of the Governors. "The Committee can't keep order; and the Governors won't support them," — is a remark I have heard: and nobody knows it better than Mr. F.

Whether or not, "disparaging," or "defaming," — as he calls it, — he can not point to any step I have taken, any word I have uttered, or any line I have written, since I first entered the Infirmary forty-three years ago, which I am not ready to justify when properly called upon.

5 Sept. 1892.

TO THE SECRETARY.

IN acknowledging your letter, with Resolutions of the Committee, speaking of a proper room for the Coroner's Courts, and the notice when Inquests are held, —I can not say that any one of the three rooms which have been used, seems to me in all respects a convenient place: but, with a knowlege of the great and continuous work of the House, and the small number of rooms in the building, I am not able to suggest an other. If the use of these rooms for the Coroner's Courts is found to clash with the purposes for which space is wanted for the House, I can remove the body upon information of a death, and hold the Inquest in one of the places provided by the City.

In every case hitherto, the notice given by me of the hour at which an Inquest would be held, has been found by the Officers of the House to be sufficient. This was brought to the knowlege of the Committee by letters from me on 13th and 19th November 1883, and 9 September 1889; and the statement so made by me has not been challenged. The Committee may be assured that sufficient notice shall be given in future, as heretofore. Any attempt to restrain me in the discretion I have in the matter of notice, must be made through the Lord Chancellor.

13 September 1892.

TO THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMITTEE.

ON Thursday last I held an Inquest on the body of T. R., who died in the Infirmary on Monday morning. The notice sent from the Infirmary is dated the 7th (Tuesday), the day after his death; and it was brought to me that day, 22 hours after

the death. If the notice had been brought in proper time, the Inquest might have been held on Tuesday.

The day of admission is stated in the notice to have been the 3rd (Friday). The witnesses at the Inquest said he was taken to the Infirmary on the 2nd (Thursday). The Nurse said it was by a mistake of hers, that the wrong day was named. I submit that it is the duty of the Officers of the House to see that the notice sent to me is correct in matters within their own knowledge.

No "Injury or disease" is mentioned in the notice; and the "circumstances of death" are given as "fractured ribs," leaving it open to question whether that injury was not received after the man was admitted.

I am informed that permission was refused to my Officer to enter the House to see the Nurse for the purpose of obtaining the information which it is necessary I should have, that I may form an opinion what witnesses will be wanted at the Inquest. The Secretary of State advised that "the Officers of the Infirmary should readily conform to all legal requirements of the Coroner, and should render to him every assistance in the conduct of his Inquest."

13 February 1893.

TO THE SAME.

IN acknowledgement of the Resolution of the Committee (of the 15th inst.), — while it is opposed to the recommendations of the Secretary of State, it is without the approval of the Lord Chancellor; and, without that approval, the Committee must be aware that it has no weight with "an Officer, having a jurisdiction, which" — as a former Chairman of the Committee, at a public meeting at the Infirmary, declared publicly, — "derives its power from a source

entirely independent of the Governors, and superior to them."

In acknowledgement of the other letter, — informing me that the Committee have been advised by Counsel that it is illegal for a Coroner to move a body from where it is lying, — I shall be greatly obliged, — for my own information and that of Coroners generally, — if you will be good enough to let me see the opinion, or advice, and the statement or case, on which it was given.

17 February 1893.

TO THE SAME.

IN acknowledgement of the letter refusing the information I asked, — the law under which Coroners have to act is so little understood, that it might be of use to make known the opinion given by Counsel. Twelve months ago, it was stated in one of the newspapers that it was illegal for the Coroner to move the body of a Child from one room to an other in the same house: six months ago, one of the Medical Officers of the Infirmary stated positively that a Coroner could not dig up a body, without leave from the Secretary of State.

Let me suggest that the Committee should submit to Counsel Lord Cross's recommendations as Secretary of State, and Lord Chancellor Selborne's statement of the law, — with, what I have called, hindrances or obstructions. Good and useful advice might be obtained, and the Officers of the House be induced to act in harmony with an Officer of the Crown.

28 February 1893.

